Empirical studies of police legitimacy in the West: Key Findings and Innovation

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Chapter 7: Empirical Studies of Police Legitimacy in the West: Key Findings and Innovation (pp. 111-130)

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Abstract

This chapter discusses research on police legitimacy in Western societies. It will first provide a brief history of early studies in the field, most notably from the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. Both the antecedents and consequences of police legitimacy will also be discussed. The chapter will then be organized around studies that have pushed the boundaries of methodological and theoretical innovation in the field; specifically: (a) research highlighting differences in police legitimacy across different population groups and contexts (e.g., racial minorities vs non-minorities; immigrants vs non-immigrants; police-initiated vs citizen-initiated contacts); (b) studies that explore legitimacy in the neighborhood context; and (c) common and innovative methodological approaches used to study police legitimacy. Finally, this chapter will end with some reflections on future directions for the field.

Keywords: police legitimacy; procedural justice; race and ethnicity; neighborhoods; compliance; cooperation; methods

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Introduction

Police play a crucial role in society. They are the visible agents of social control, and are integral for deterring, preventing and solving crime. To carry out their duties effectively, however, police require support from the public. Police rely heavily on the public to comply willingly with police instructions and to comply with the law more generally. Effective crime control is also contingent on members of the public reporting crime and victimization to police and working side-by-side with the police in collaborative crime prevention initiatives (Tyler 1990).

How then can police garner such support from the public? Research shows that a key reason people support police is because they view them as legitimate (Hinds and Murphy 2007; Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler 1990). "Legitimacy reflects the degree to which people recognize the right of an authority to govern their behavior" (Murphy 2017, p. 45). Providing an authority with legitimacy transfers to them the authority and right to define what constitutes acceptable behavior. Western legitimacy scholars have long recognized that legitimacy reflects a social value orientation toward authority and institutions (e.g., Tyler 1990). In the policing context, this suggests that people defer to and obey official directives or commands from police because people respect (and accept) police officers' authority to make decisions, not because they fear being sanctioned by police for non-compliance (Hinds and Murphy 2007). Importantly, there is empirical evidence to suggest that a legitimate police force can elicit greater compliance with police directives and laws, as well as promoting voluntary behaviors such as crime and victimization reporting (e.g., Jackson et al. 2012; Murphy and Barkworth 2014; Murphy et al. 2008; Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler 1990). As such, police legitimacy is essential to the effective functioning of police.

This chapter discusses empirical studies that have been conducted on police legitimacy in Western countries (i.e., North America, Europe, the United Kingdom, and Australia). It should be noted that our intention is not to provide a systematic review of all empirical studies that have been published on police legitimacy in the West. Rather, this chapter provides a basic overview of research into how the study of police legitimacy first emerged in Western countries, along with some more recent developments. It should also be noted that any discussion of police legitimacy cannot be separated from research on procedural justice. As such, the current chapter discusses the key relationship between procedural justice and police legitimacy (for systematic reviews of the police legitimacy and procedural justice literatures see Mazerolle et al. 2013; Mazerolle et al. 2014; Donner et al. 2015; Walters and Bolger 2019; Worden and McLean 2017). Finally, of note is that definitions of legitimacy vary, and debate about how legitimacy should be conceptualized and operationalized persists. The measurement of police legitimacy will be the focus of Chapter 2 by Graham, Chapter 3 by Maguire, and Chapter 6 by Blount-Hill and Gau in the current book, so will not be discussed further here.

Research on police legitimacy: Considering antecedents and consequences of police legitimacy

Early research on police legitimacy

Tom Tyler is often credited as the founding father of modern-day police legitimacy research. His highly cited book *'Why people obey the law'* was first published in 1990 and has had significant influence on the field. Since its publication, a large body of research has emerged focusing on police legitimacy and both its antecedents and consequences in both Western and non-Western countries. In 2007, Tonry noted that the scholarly literature on police legitimacy was distinctly American (Tonry 2007, p.3); in other words, very little research had been

conducted on police legitimacy outside the United States (US) at that time. He hypothesized this may have been due to the "United States' distinctive constitutional scheme premised on notions of limited powers of government and entrenched rights of citizens" (Tonry 2007, p.4). He also suggested there may be variation in how people view police legitimacy in Europe compared to America given the different systems of law. Since then, research on police legitimacy outside America has grown exponentially. Research was first conducted in Australia and the United Kingdom (UK) in the mid-2000s, followed by research in other European countries. This chapter focuses on studies conducted in these Western countries (for a discussion of research in non-Western countries see Chapter 8 by Jang and Hwang and Chapter 9 by Cao and Boateng).

Tyler's (1990) original research was driven by his need to answer the following question: Why do people obey the law willingly when the probability of detection for non-compliance is often low? To answer this question, Tyler collected longitudinal survey data from a sample of Americans living in Chicago. He was interested in the experiences, attitudes and self-reported behaviors of individuals with recent personal contact with police. Telephone interviews were first conducted with 1575 respondents. Following this, a random subset of 804 of these respondents was followed up one year later and re-surveyed. In the wave 1 survey, 652 respondents reported having had a personal experience with a police officer in the preceding 12-month period. In the wave 2 survey, 329 respondents reported having had a personal experience with police in the period between the two surveys. Tyler measured perceptions of police legitimacy using items that tapped into respondents' feelings of obligation to obey police and the law (e.g., 'People should obey the law even if it goes against what they think is right'), as well as their trust and support for police (e.g., 'I have a great deal of respect for police'). Tyler also measured respondents' self-reported compliance

with six common laws (e.g., 'I drove a car while intoxicated'). Respondents were asked how often they had violated these six laws in the preceding 12-month period. In addition to personal morality predicting compliance behavior, Tyler found a positive link between survey participants' perceptions of police as legitimate and their self-reported compliance behavior. That is, study participants were more likely to say they had complied with various laws if they perceived police as more legitimate (for similar findings see Jackson et al. 2012).

More than 15 years after Tyler's initial 1990 study, two studies extended Tyler's findings to show that police legitimacy perceptions could also be linked to public cooperation with police (i.e., willingness to help or report crime to police). Sunshine and Tyler (2003) drew on longitudinal survey data from 1653 New Yorkers to show that respondents who perceived police as more legitimate were more likely to say they would willingly cooperate with police. Similarly, Murphy et al. (2008) drew on survey data from 2611 Australians who had been involved in a community policing initiative in their neighborhood. Murphy et al. found that when residents perceived police as more legitimate they reported being more willing to cooperate with police. On balance, the evidence suggests that legitimacy is more strongly linked to public cooperation with police than public compliance with laws (Nagin and Telep 2020).

The identified link between police legitimacy and cooperation/compliance led researchers to investigate what police should do to best promote their legitimacy. In sum, research revealed that "the legitimacy of authorities and institutions is rooted in public views about the appropriateness of the manner in which the police exercise their authority" (Tyler 2004, p.91). For example, several studies conducted in the early- to mid-2000s by Tyler and others revealed that both instrumental and normative concerns were linked to police legitimacy

evaluations (e.g., Hinds and Murphy 2007; Murphy et al. 2008; Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler 1990; Tyler 2004; Tyler and Huo 2002). Citizens' instrumental concerns typically centered on perceptions of police effectiveness, deterrence and judgements about police use of distributive justice, while their normative concerns typically centered on perceptions of police being procedurally just. That is, police were perceived as more legitimate when they were seen to be: (a) effectively controlling crime and criminal behavior (police effectiveness), (b) creating a credible risk of detection and sanction for those who broke the law (deterrence), (c) fairly distributing police services across people and communities (distributive justice); and (d) enacting their power in a procedurally just manner (Hinds and Murphy 2007; Sunshine and Tyler 2003). Crucially, most Western studies showed that procedural justice is the primary antecedent of the public's police legitimacy evaluations. While research showed that police legitimacy tended to be lower in autocratic western nations than in liberal democratic nations (see Jackson et al. 2014; Mesko and Klemencic 2007), European studies suggested that "similar procedural considerations are important in shaping the legitimacy of police" (Tyler et al. 2007, p.20; van Craen 2012). The same is true of Australian and UK studies. In fact, one common finding in most Western police legitimacy studies is that procedural justice concerns tend to dominate public perceptions of police legitimacy, not instrumental concerns. This effect has become widely known as the "procedural justice effect" (Wolfe et al. 2016).

Procedural justice reflects "the fairness of the processes through which the police make decisions and exercise authority" (Sunshine and Tyler 2003, p.514). Procedural justice in policing is present when police are *respectful* of citizens, when they are *neutral* in their decision making, when they portray *trustworthy motives*, and when they provide citizens the opportunity to *voice* concerns before police make a decision (Tyler et al. 2007). Importantly,

while individual police officers often struggle to control how effective police are, the level of deterrence they provide, or the equality of service they provide across people and places, police can alter how they treat people and make decisions; that is, how they emphasize the elements of procedural justice in encounters with the public. This is why scholars argue that procedural justice as a police legitimacy builder shows much promise (e.g., Bradford et al. 2014; Hinds and Murphy 2007; Jackson et al. 2012; Murphy et al. 2014; Tyler 1990).

Additional antecedents and consequences of police legitimacy.

So far in this Chapter, we have concentrated on empirical research that has identified common antecedents of police legitimacy evaluations in Western countries. We have also noted how police legitimacy has been positively linked with greater voluntary compliance and cooperation with police and laws. In the 20 years following the publication of Tyler's seminal 1990 book, numerous studies explored the effects of police legitimacy on other types of public attitudes and behaviors and has subsequently identified further antecedents and consequences of police legitimacy.

In terms of additional and notable *antecedents* of police legitimacy, Jackson and his colleagues (2012) in the UK, for example, suggested that for police to be viewed as legitimate they also had to be *normatively aligned* with the public they served, and be morally upstanding themselves (i.e., *police legality*). Normative alignment between police and the public exists when members of the public believe police share broadly similar moral positions about appropriate law-abiding behavior, while police legality reflects whether authorities themselves follow ethical guidelines and laws. Thus, if police are normatively aligned with the public and act in an ethical manner and exercise their authority lawfully

according to well established legal principles, they will be seen as more legitimate (see also Chapter 3 by Maguire).

A growing body of research explores the types of police strategies that might best be utilized to promote police legitimacy or alternatively, that might disrupt perceptions of police legitimacy. For example, Gill et al. (2014) undertook a systematic review of research examining the relationship between *community-oriented policing* and police legitimacy and related outcomes. "Community-oriented policing (COP) is a philosophy of policing that emphasizes community involvement in crime prevention efforts, in contrast to the focus of traditional policing on law enforcement and order maintenance" (Gill et al. 2014, p. 400). In their review, Gill et al. (2014) identified 10 studies (located in Australia, the UK and the US) that examined the relationship between COP and legitimacy and found that, in the majority of studies, COP improved perceptions of legitimacy (see also Chapter 1 by Cao).

In contrast to COP, *hot-spots policing* is one strategy that is anticipated to damage perceptions of legitimacy. Hot-spots policing, which shows that "police can be effective in combating crime and disorder problems when they focus resources on very small areas with a high level of crime problems" (Weisburd et al. 2011, p.298), might be expected to damage police-community relations due to the use of concentrated and potentially heavy-handed tactics (see Kochel 2011). That being said, Weisburd and colleagues (2011, p.297) found no evidence of this "backfire effect" in their study of hot-spots policing in San Bernadino, US.

On a more micro-scale, researchers have also examined the effect that *police accoutrements* might have on public perceptions of police legitimacy. For example, body worn cameras (BWCs) are expected to "improve police behavior, make officers act appropriately, treat

people fairly, treat people respectfully, and reduce police misconduct", therefore increasing police legitimacy (Demir 2021, p.4). However, results in the extant literature are mixed and suggest that citizen awareness of the presence or absence of BWCs may play a role in this relationship. Demir (2021), for example, examined perceptions of police legitimacy and BWC awareness using a vignette experiment in a sample of undergraduate students in America. Demir (2021) found that notification of, and awareness of BWC, improved perceptions of police legitimacy, compared to unawareness of the BWC in the vignettes. Similarly, and again in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Simpson and Sandrin (2022) examined the effect of different items of personal protective equipment (PPE) on public perceptions of procedural justice in a North American sample. They found that, when worn by a police officer, different items of PPE including "face masks, face shields, goggles and medical gloves" impacted on participants' perceptions of procedural justice in their study (Simpson and Sandrin 2022, p.154). Combined, these studies suggest that both police strategies and police appearance may be adapted to improve perceptions of both procedural justice and police legitimacy.

In terms of potential *consequences* of police legitimacy—in addition to cooperation and compliance—recent research has focused on a third important outcome of police legitimacy; that is, "police empowerment". The "empowerment hypothesis" suggests that "as the legitimacy of the police increases, the public is increasingly willing to grant more discretion and autonomy to law enforcement and support police practices, even those that may infringe on civil liberties" (Fox et al. 2021, p.4; see also Sunshine and Tyler 2003). This concept is particularly relevant when exploring new police powers and technologies (e.g., police militarisation and the use of drones), as well as contexts where new police powers suddenly

emerge (e.g., powers such as those used in response to counter-terrorism, riots, the COVID-19 pandemic, or during the Black Lives Matter movement (see Chapter 5 by Barak)).

Although the relationship between police legitimacy and police empowerment was originally conceptualized and tested in Sunshine and Tyler's (2003) study, empirical research has only recently sought to replicate the positive association between these concepts. In their review of the literature Fox et al. (2021) identified eight recent studies (including Sunshine and Tyler 2003) that had examined the relationship between police legitimacy variables and police empowerment in the West (predominantly in the US and the UK). These studies examined various "types" of police empowerment including support for: reasonable and excessive use of force; the use of military weapons/equipment; and police discretion. These studies found support for the "empowerment hypothesis". More recently, two studies have examined whether police legitimacy is associated with police empowerment to enforce social distancing laws during the COVID-19 pandemic (Nix et al. 2021; Sargeant et al. 2022). These studies suggest that instrumental factors (such as health risk and police effectiveness) may be more important than police legitimacy when predicting police empowerment during a pandemic. This may be due to the perceived high-risk to public health that emerges alongside increases in police powers during pandemics.

Police legitimacy research across different population groups and policing contexts

Thus far in this Chapter, we have explained the antecedents and consequences of police legitimacy. One question that has arisen in the literature is: Are the antecedents of police legitimacy constant across all people and places? As we note above, there may be some situations (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) where instrumental factors may matter more

than normative factors when predicting support for the police. There is some evidence that this is also the case in other policing contexts and for different population groups.

In their study of English residents, for example, Jackson et al. (2012) demonstrated that the effect of procedural justice on survey respondents' obligation to obey police (i.e., a police legitimacy measure) was invariant across age, gender, race, prior victimization, prior police contact, and neighborhood context. Similarly, Wolfe et al. (2016) comprehensively tested whether the "procedural justice effect" was invariant across different groups of people in the United States. Drawing on survey data from 1681 Americans from a mid-sized urban city, Wolfe et al. compared whether procedural justice was a stronger predictor of police legitimacy than other instrumental factors (i.e., distributive justice and police effectiveness). Police legitimacy evaluations were measured as obligation to obey police and trust in police. Wolfe et al. compared crime victims with non-victims, those with police contact to those with no police contact, males versus females, old versus young Americans, racial minorities versus non-minorities, and individuals with varying levels of education. Respondents were also asked about the type of neighborhood they lived in to ascertain whether the "procedural justice effect" was invariant across residents living in different neighborhoods. Wolfe et al. found that the "procedural justice effect" was largely invariant across individual and situational differences. There was one caveat to their conclusion, however. Procedural justice was found to be much more pronounced on trust in the police for victims of crime than for non-victims.

While the three studies cited above revealed that the procedural justice effect seemed to be invariant across groups in the United States and the UK, findings from Australia and Europe are less clear on this front. For example, in one of the first studies testing the relationship

between procedural justice and police legitimacy outside the United States, Hinds and Murphy (2007) found that Australians tended to place far greater weight on instrumental concerns than Americans. Using survey data from 2611 Australians, Hinds and Murphy found that Australians gave almost equal weight to police effectiveness and procedural justice when evaluating the legitimacy of the police. Also in Australia, Sargeant et al. (2014) found that some ethnic/racial minorities living in Australia tend to favor instrumental concerns like police effectiveness over procedural justice when evaluating police legitimacy, while for other minority groups the opposite is the case. In a series of Australian studies, Murphy and her colleagues also demonstrated that the "procedural justice effect" can vary between different types of crime victim, and also between citizens who experience different types of police contact. Specifically, Murphy and Barkworth (2014) found that victims of violent crime placed more value on procedural justice than police effectiveness, while victims of property crime placed more value on police effectiveness. Australians who had experienced a recent police-initiated contact also placed more value on procedural justice than police effectiveness, while the opposite was true for Australians involved in a citizen-initiated contact (Murphy 2009; Murphy and McPherson 2022). These Australian findings suggest that the "procedural justice effect" might not be invariant across all situations or individuals. This has also been confirmed in a recent study conducted in Europe. In Belgium, Van Craen (2012) found that ethnic minorities (N=456) placed more importance on police effectiveness than procedural justice when placing confidence in police. Drawing on survey data from 1000 Slovenian participants, Reisig et al. (2021) showed that the association between procedural justice and police legitimacy was stronger in respondents from low-crime neighborhoods. In high-crime areas, instrumental concerns (i.e., distributive justice) were a stronger correlate of legitimacy. Thus, further research in western countries is warranted to ascertain if, when, and for whom these variations in the "procedural justice effect" occur.

Regardless of whether normative or instrumental concerns dominate the public's police legitimacy evaluations, research has consistently shown that particular groups in the population tend to view police as less legitimate. For example, young people tend to hold less favorable assessments of police legitimacy and police conduct when compared to adults (e.g., Murphy, 2015). Unsurprisingly, research conducted in numerous Western countries has found that people of color (i.e., ethnic/racial minorities) are typically less likely to trust police, have lower confidence in police, or view police as less legitimate (e.g., Cao and Wu 2019; Tyler and Huo 2002; Tyler et al. 2007; Van Craen 2013; Van Craen and Skogan 2015). Research also finds that immigrants originating from non-Western countries often perceive police in their host country as less legitimate than immigrants who originate from Western countries, although evidence on immigrants' attitudes appear to be mixed (Jung et al. 2019; Murphy and Mazerolle 2018; Pass et al. 2020; Tyler et al. 2007; van Craen 2012). It has been suggested that these findings are most likely due to young peoples' and minorities' heightened experiences of negative police contact, oppression and discrimination at the hands of western police (Murphy 2015; Wu et al. 2017). Having said that, in a meta-review of the literature, Cao and Wu (2019) found that when police contacts and concentrated disadvantage are controlled for, the effect of race/ethnicity tends to be attenuated and sometimes disappears. There thus seems to be some merit in further exploring the effect of disadvantage and ethnicity/race in future police legitimacy studies (for more on this suggestion see Chapter 1 by Cao and Chapter 4 by Sun and Wu in this book).

Police legitimacy in the neighborhood context

Police legitimacy research has often focused on the common antecedents and consequences of police legitimacy for individuals or groups. A smaller body of work has examined the way

that *place* (i.e., one's neighborhood) informs perceptions of police. These studies are typically positioned within the US 'Chicago School' of place-based research (see for example Sampson et al. 1997) which draws on social disorganization theory to situate individuals' attitudes and behaviors within the context of neighborhood structure and culture (Sampson and Groves 1989).

To understand the relationship between neighborhood context and police legitimacy, we can consider what we already know, and perhaps have long suspected about police behavior. Research suggests that neighborhood structural characteristics such as disadvantage, crime rate, ethnic heterogeneity and residential stability, shape the way police approach particular neighborhoods and the residents who live there (e.g., Kane 2002; Klinger 1997). For example, police may be more likely to over- or under-police neighborhoods which have higher rates of disadvantage and crime, and higher proportions of ethnic/racial minority group members (e.g., Brunson and Miller 2006; Carr et al. 2007; Gau and Brunson 2010).

Scholars have also argued that neighborhood residents may draw social cues from their surroundings and that these cues may inform their beliefs about police behavior and legitimacy (e.g., Jackson et al. 2013). Explained further, in neighborhoods that are socially cohesive and have strong informal social controls (i.e., have higher levels of collective efficacy), residents will likely believe that the police are more legitimate and effective (Jackson et al. 2013). This is because neighborhood cues may trigger the assumption that policing is functioning well in the neighborhood, regardless of whether or not police are a visible presence.

Building on this understanding, a number of studies have found that neighborhoods and their structural characteristics are linked to residents' attitudes to police more broadly (e.g., Sampson and Jeglum Bartush 1998; Reisig and Parks 2000). In the first published study exploring how neighborhood structure impacted on public perceptions of police legitimacy, Gau et al. (2012) surveyed 531 residents living in 31 neighborhoods in one US city. Although Gau et al. (2012) predicted a relationship between neighborhood structure and perceptions of police legitimacy[2] they found that, when controlling for individual-level variables (in particular procedural justice, distributive fairness and social cohesion), neighborhood structural characteristics including homicide rate, residential instability and concentrated disadvantage, were not significant predictors of police legitimacy (concentrated disadvantage was marginally significant). In similar research in Australia, Sargeant (2012; 2017) found that police legitimacy (when measured as obligation to obey) did not vary across neighborhoods but that trust in police was associated with neighborhood collective efficacy.

Research conducted in the UK suggests there may be more of a connection between police legitimacy and the neighborhood, compared to research in the US and Australia. Jackson et al. (2013, p.161) studied 4,500 individuals nested in 900 London neighborhoods and found that around 30 percent of the variation in police legitimacy evaluations could be attributed to ones' place of residence, and that concentrated disadvantage in the neighborhood was a significant predictor of police legitimacy (see also Reisig et al.'s 2021 research in Slovenia). Jackson et al. also included neighborhood social characteristics (including collective efficacy) as predictors of police legitimacy (measured as obligation to obey police and normative alignment). They hypothesised that "when subtle, informal social controls are strong,

[2] Measured as: "People's basic rights are well protected by police in your neighborhood"; "Most police officers in your neighborhood do their jobs well"; and "Police in neighborhood can't be trusted to make decisions (reversed)" (Gau et al. 2012, p.337).

observers may conclude that the police are competent" (Jackson et al. 2013, p.162). However, while they found that collective efficacy was predictive of normative alignment, it was not predictive of the obligation to obey police, once controlling for other variables in their models (Jackson et al. 2013).

Examining police legitimacy in the neighborhood context is a relatively new and evolving area of research. Overall, this research presents mixed results. However, it is important to note that studies vary by country context and in the way that they: a) conceptualize and measure legitimacy; and b) conceptualize and measure neighborhood or area. Regarding variation in country context, Sargeant (2012; 2017) suggested that where policing organizations are state-based (such as in Australia) local perceptions of police may be heavily influenced by social media and news media about police-citizen interactions across the state – as opposed to their local district. Likewise, Tyler et al. (2007) suggested that different policing models or strategies used across countries, cities, or regions might differentially alter how individuals perceive police (see also Tonry 2007).

Methodological approaches used in police legitimacy research

Various methodological approaches have been used to study police legitimacy. As seen below these include survey methods, systematic observational methods, interview or focus-group methods, and experiments. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses.

Survey methodology: The most common approach

Most published police legitimacy research (including those studies cited above) tend to utilize self-report survey methodology. These correlational studies tend to find that when people view police as more procedurally just and/or more effective, they are more likely to

say police have legitimacy, and report being more willing to comply or cooperate with police and the law. This has been found using both cross-sectional surveys and longitudinal surveys. In these conventional survey studies, researchers typically present participants with psychometric scales measuring relevant concepts of interest (e.g., procedural justice; police legitimacy; self-reported compliance) and then use regression techniques to examine the strength of associations between variables. The advantage of surveys is that they allow police legitimacy researchers to collect data from large and sometimes representative samples of the community. The time and resourcing costs associated with using surveys can also be much more feasible than other methodologies.

Systematic observation methodology

Studies that utilize observational methodologies to explore police legitimacy reveal similar findings to survey studies, but are much less common in the literature. Mastrofski and his colleagues, for example, published a number of studies in the late 1990s/early 2000s showing that citizens were much less defiant or violent toward police when police were observed by researchers to be utilizing procedural justice in encounters (e.g., Mastrofski et al. 1996; 2002; McCluskey et al. 1999; Reisig et al. 2004). Using similar observational methods, Dai et al. (2011) found that police officers who gave citizens a voice in encounters were significantly able to reduce citizen noncompliance.

There is a reason why systematic observational studies are quite rare. Observational studies are extremely resource intensive for researchers. In these studies, teams of researchers either participate in ride-alongs with police or, alternatively, observe interactions between police and members of the public in particular neighborhoods. This often requires hours of time in the field, reviewing footage or field notes, taking the time to objectively and reliably code

and analyze the data. Given these challenges, a new form of observational research has commenced on policing and police legitimacy by taking advantage of the recent adoption of body worn cameras (BWCs) by police. This new type of observational work does not require observers to spend hours of time conducting fieldwork. But it still involves viewing BWC footage captured by police officers during public encounters (e.g., Lum et al. 2019; McCluskey et al. 2019). These newer studies typically explore the impact of BWCs on police and citizen behavior, and specifically whether or not police are more procedurally just when they are wearing their cameras and recording encounters. There appears to be some suggestion that there are benefits for police legitimacy when police wear and use cameras as this new technology prevents potentially unethical and procedurally unjust behavior from police (see McCluskey et al. 2019).

Interview and focus-group methodology

Interview and focus-group studies have also been used to study police legitimacy, but they too can be resource intensive. They also usually involve small unrepresentative samples. Interviews and focus groups can provide depth of understanding related to the factors that either produce or damage public perceptions of police legitimacy. For example, Ali et al. (2021) explored 104 Muslim-Australians' perceptions of the legitimacy of counter-terrorism police officers. For many of the Muslim participants, police were viewed with scepticism and many respondents reported counter-terrorism police as lacking in legitimacy. A variety of reasons were given by respondents as to why this was the case, so this methodology was able to provide a rich source of information to better understand why Muslims often question the legitimacy of counter-terrorism police (for other interview studies see Gau and Brunson 2010; Stoutland 2001; for a review see Worden and McLean 2017). The ability of interviews

and focus-groups to generalize findings to the broader population of interest, however, can suffer due to the small sample size and potentially subjective input from the researcher.

Randomized experimental methodology

The outcomes discussed above from police legitimacy research has led police organizations around the world to adopt and recommend procedural justice into policing practice as a way of improving public support for police and their actions. One criticism raised of the existing body of police legitimacy research, however, is that few studies actually demonstrate that procedural justice works in practice or that it causes desired changes in public sentiment. That is, there remains a question about whether procedural justice actually promotes a change in citizens' behaviors or perceptions of police legitimacy (Nagin and Telep 2017). This criticism has resulted in a new wave of police legitimacy research focused on demonstrating cause and effect in applied settings. Since 2012, several researchers in Australia, the US, and the UK have worked alongside police agencies to develop procedural justice interventions and to test the outcomes of these interventions in applied settings. They draw on randomized controlled trial methodology. These studies aim to test whether implementing procedural justice into police practice will: (a) improve the public's view of police as legitimate; (b) result in greater satisfaction with police treatment and services; or (c) yield greater compliance and cooperation with police and the law. Some experimental studies also explore whether training police officers to use procedural justice influences their behavior in public interactions (e.g., Antrobus et al. 2019).

The first randomized field study of police legitimacy was conducted by Lorraine Mazerolle and her colleagues in Queensland, Australia. The Queensland Community Engagement Trial (QCET) examined whether introducing elements of procedural justice into a police roadside stop (experimental condition) increased drivers' perceptions of police legitimacy relative to standard police procedure (control condition). Given that an experimental manipulation was used in the trial, the causal relationship between the treatment drivers received from police during the encounter and the subsequent impact it had on their police legitimacy evaluations could be assessed. Drivers who were involved in both the trial's experimental and control conditions were asked to complete a self-report survey of their experience (N=2762). Mazerolle et al. (2012) demonstrated that the experimental manipulation resulted in a number of positive outcomes. Drivers exposed to the experimental condition (i.e., those who received the new procedural justice protocol) were more likely than control group drivers to perceive police treatment as procedurally just. Mazerolle et al. (2012) also showed that drivers in the experimental manipulation were more satisfied with the encounter, and reported being more compliant with the police officer conducting the roadside stop, but there was no difference in police legitimacy judgments between the two conditions. Using the same data, Murphy et al. (2014) revealed that the experimental treatment improved drivers' trust in the police officer, and a third paper showed that the procedural justice condition not only produced more favorable perceptions of the specific encounter with police, but that procedural justice improved people's overall views of police more generally (Mazerolle et al. 2013). Several other studies have used field experiments in other Western countries (e.g., Scotland and England; see MacQueen and Bradford 2015; Wheller et al. 2013).

Randomized laboratory studies have also been used to manipulate procedural justice in *vicarious* police-citizen encounters to explore its effects on police legitimacy evaluations.

Unlike the real-world field trials discussed above, these laboratory experiments can assess the "influence of positive, negative, and neutral police behavior during traffic stops on citizen perceptions of police" (Maguire et al. 2017, p.367). They can also tell us more about cause and effect than the traditional survey studies discussed earlier. Again, the results of these laboratory-based studies show that procedural justice can improve citizens' trust in police, feelings of obligation to obey police, police legitimacy, and compliance (e.g., Barkworth and Murphy 2015; Johnson et al. 2017; Lowrey et al. 2016; Maguire et al. 2017; Murphy in press).

While randomized experiments have long been used in medical and psychological research, the burgeoning use of randomized experiments in criminology, and policing specifically, offers a fruitful avenue for researchers seeking to explore cause and effect between procedural justice, police legitimacy and compliance or cooperation. Future research should be conducted in western countries to ascertain the effectiveness of procedural justice for improving police legitimacy and other outcomes.

Future directions for police legitimacy research

Before we conclude, it is worth noting two potential areas for future research on police legitimacy. While there are likely to be other innovations that could be explored (and we have suggested some above), below are just a couple that we think might push the study of police legitimacy in new and innovative directions.

First, we have observed that the police legitimacy field has been dominated by a select few theories that attempt to explain why people legitimize police. These theories tend to center on social identity processes. These social identity theories—most notably the Group Value,

Group Position, and Group Engagement Models—suggest that the experience of receiving procedural justice from police has positive effects on legitimacy evaluations and compliance behaviors because fair treatment strengthens people's connections and identity to the social groups that police are said to represent—particularly for minority groups (Bradford et al. 2014). This connection or identity promotes allegiance to group norms and values, which fosters support for group authorities (i.e., enhances police legitimacy) and their laws. As Murphy (2017, p.49) notes individuals "feel they should support the authority of the groups to which they belong and they internalise the value that they should obey the authority of a group with which they identify". Scholars have commonly utilized these identity-based theories to explain *why* procedural justice promotes police legitimacy, and *why* legitimacy promotes voluntary law-abiding behavior. They have also been used to explain why some people or groups value procedural justice more than instrumental concerns when evaluating the police (Bradford et al. 2014; Murphy et al. 2022).

Given the vast number of published studies on procedural justice and police legitimacy, there has surprisingly been few attempts to offer alternative theoretical models or to extend theorizing by incorporating other perspectives. Future research may therefore seek to explore alternative theories from disciplines such as social psychology, criminology or political science to offer up other reasons for why people grant the police legitimacy, and why procedural justice has such a positive effect on legitimizing police. Criminological theorizing, for example, has pointed to the role that emotion and stigmatization play in explaining defiance toward authorities or non-compliance with the law (see Braithwaite 1989; Murphy and Tyler 2008; Sherman 1993). These emotion and stigmatization theories posit that the experience of injustice can elicit negative emotions and/or stigmatization, which clouds the lens through which individuals interpret subsequent events. This follows that when police

officers are procedurally unjust, negative affect and stigmatization might be elicited, which produces negative attitudes and behaviors directed toward the source of the injustice (i.e., reduced police legitimacy or defying police requests).

A second avenue for future research relates to the use of technology to explore how police conduct affects police legitimacy. As mentioned earlier, the police legitimacy field has been dominated by studies that adopt survey methodology. While there is much value in this type of research, scholars could extend the field in a number of ways, even when using surveys. We have touched on the burgeoning use of randomized controlled trials to study cause and effect (i.e., how procedural justice might impact police legitimacy in the field, and how legitimacy might subsequently effect compliance). This type of methodology is extremely useful for overcoming some of the limitations regarding causation inherent in cross-sectional survey designs in particular. However, researchers might also consider tapping into innovative ways of exploring justice experiences and its impact on police legitimacy evaluations. For example, it can be very expensive and difficult to establish relationships with police agencies to conduct large field studies such as the Queensland Community Engagement Trial discussed earlier. For most researchers, this type of randomized controlled field trial is simply not possible. This is where examining BWC police footage (either provided by police or that which is publicly available) can assist researchers to evaluate whether just or unjust treatment from police does causally effect citizens' behavior or perceptions of police legitimacy. Other technologies that immerse individuals into realistic 'experiences with police' could be used to examine the effect of such experiences on public attitudes and behaviors. For example, making use of virtual reality as an immersive experience could allow researchers to explore the effect of manipulating realistic scenarios on public evaluations of police legitimacy. Alternatively, exploring the effect of 'injustice'

experiences using virtual reality or when using hypothetical vignettes or videos on subsequent physiological responses (e.g., stress tests; how emotion centres of the brain become activated, etc.) seems a next logical step in studying the effects of procedural justice or injustice on a range of outcomes beyond police legitimacy (see Dang et al. 2022).

Conclusion

The study of police legitimacy in Western democracies has come a long way since Tyler's original 1990 Chicago study. This chapter provided a brief overview of the studies that have been conducted in western countries on this topic. The chapter identified the common antecedents and consequences of police legitimacy that have been explored, highlighted differences in police legitimacy across different population groups and policing contexts, noted how legitimacy may differ by place, and discussed various methodological approaches that have been commonly used to study of police legitimacy. We concluded with some reflections on the future direction of the field. What seems to be clear from this body of research is that perceiving police as legitimate is important for Western police agencies. If police wish to promote public compliance and cooperation with police and the law more generally, police must have legitimacy. On the basis of the evidence collected to date, western research suggests that procedural justice is highly important for promoting the public's views of police as legitimate. What is needed from here is to have police agencies recognize this evidence and make a commitment to implement procedural justice into police practice. This can be done by providing a system of rewards that places value on officers using procedural justice in encounters with the public. Having said this, police agencies must be cognizant of the fact that implementing procedural justice does not come easily to all

officers. Any agency-wide policy that states that officers must use procedural justice needs to be backed up with training in procedural justice.

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